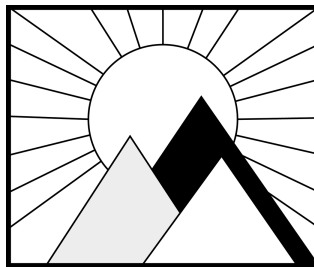


Bureau of Rehabilitation Services



2002-2003 Annual Report

State of Connecticut



Department of Social Services

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Connecticut Department of Social Services

2002-2003 Annual Report

A Message from the Director:

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is a recognized leader in providing disability programs for Connecticut's citizens with physical, mental, sensory and intellectual disabilities. This report details the achievements of the Bureau's programs, which help our consumers to achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency and full independence in their communities. These programs include:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program
Disability Determination Services
The Connect To Work Center
The Employment Opportunities Program
The Connecticut Tech Act Project
The Independent Living Program

The Bureau's toughest challenge has been continuing to provide quality, timely services due to the loss of personnel who accepted the state's early retirement program. Approximately 30% of the total BRS staff, including the director and all three bureau chiefs, took advantage of this offer. The three bureau chiefs returned for a limited extended contract to ease this transition period. Remaining staff have taken on more duties as we struggle to continue our tradition of innovative, excellent customer service, to ensure that Connecticut's citizens with disabilities have access to the most effective and state-of-the-art programs.

Economic self-sufficiency, community independence, public-private partnerships and customer satisfaction will continue to be the primary goals of our programs.

As we regroup and move forward, the scope and types of services offered through the Bureau's programs will continue to evolve, reflecting the changing fiscal, economic and programmatic climate. We will strive to provide programs that give citizens with disabilities a meaningful array of choices through which to achieve their independent living and economic goals.

The creativity and innovative spirit of individuals with disabilities will continue to influence the outcomes we achieve. We are most successful when we bring consumers and their families together with BRS staff and our public and private partners in a productive and meaningful collaboration.

John J. Gallette, Interim Director
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Between October 1, 2002 and September 30, 2003:

- 1,722 consumers successfully completed services in employment.
- 99% of those were in competitive employment:
 - earning an average hourly wage of \$12.99;
 - working an average of 30 hours per week.
- 746 individuals advanced from being dependent on public benefits or their families to being economically self-supporting.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is the primary employment program of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services. The focus of VR is to help individuals with significant disabilities to attain economic independence by preparing for, finding, and maintaining employment in the community.

An individual who has a significant disability which poses a barrier to employment and requires services in order to attain or maintain employment, will be eligible for the VR program. Vocational rehabilitation counselors and other BRS staff are available in 17 locations around the state. They work in partnership with individuals or groups to help consumers discover their strengths and limitations as they relate to work. To assist individuals in making informed choices, VR counselors offer career exploration and counseling and vocational information.

An Individualized Employment Plan (IEP) is developed when the consumer and the

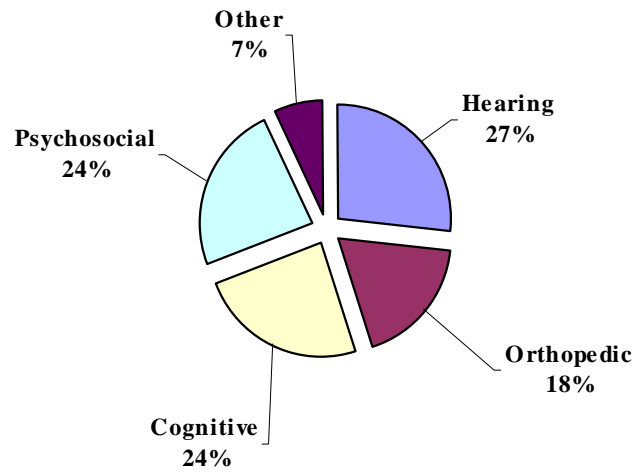
Bureau agree upon an employment goal and the services needed to achieve that goal. In addition to career counseling, the IEP may include education and training, functional/physical restoration, adaptive technology, job placement assistance and supports, or a variety of other vocational rehabilitation services needed for the individual to reach his or her employment goal.

The key to success in the VR program is the relationship between the consumer and the vocational rehabilitation counselor or other BRS staff.

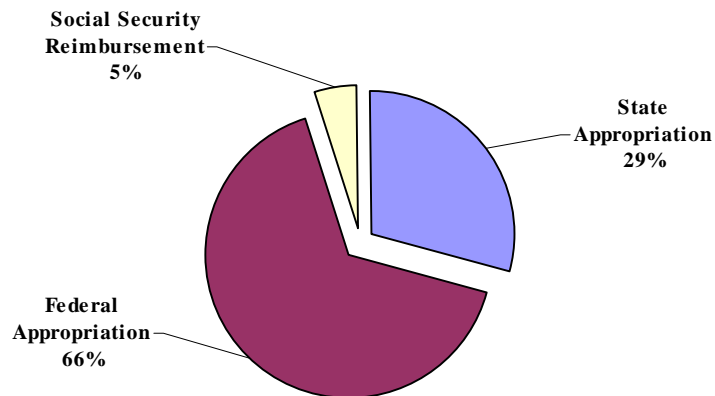
For more information about the Vocational Rehabilitation program, and to obtain a list of the offices of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, call 1-800-537-2549 (V) or 860-424-4839 (TDD/TTY).

Information is also available via e-mail by contacting evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us, and by visiting the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services web site at www.brs.state.ct.us.

Individuals Employed by Disability Type
October 1, 2002 - September 30, 2003
(n=1,722)



Appropriations by Funding Source SFY 2003
(Total=\$23,568,610)



The State Rehabilitation Council

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) partners with BRS to assess, advise and recommend activities and policies that would support services and opportunities for individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

In 2003, the SRC accomplishments included the following:

- Assisted BRS in developing a follow-up to the original statewide consumer satisfaction survey.
- Partnered with other New England states to develop a regional consumer satisfaction survey that will be implemented in 2004.
- Offered financial and in-kind support for the Youth Leadership Forum, which seeks to develop leadership among high school students with disabilities.
- Collaborated with BRS to develop the State Plan Annual Update.
- Helped to plan and implement a job fair for individuals with disabilities in the Fairfield County area.
- Participated in ongoing discussions with BRS field staff to ensure open communication.

In 2004, the SRC plans to achieve the following goals:

- Partner with the New England states to implement a regional consumer satisfaction survey.
- Obtain a seat and a greater role in the Business Leadership Network in order to have a greater voice and interaction with Connecticut businesses.
- Increase legislative education opportunities on behalf of BRS.
- Develop a directory of councils that serve individuals with disabilities throughout Connecticut and distributing the directory.
- Develop a procedure with the new BRS administration by which new policies and initiatives are explored with the Council prior to implementation.
- Support the Youth Leadership Forum through financial and in-kind assistance.
- Collaborate with BRS on the State Plan Annual Update.

For information on the State Rehabilitation Council, call 1-800-537-2549 (V) or 860-424-4839 (TDD/TTY). Information is also available by e-mail at evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us, and by visiting the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services web site at www.brs.state.ct.us.

Disability Determination Services

Between October 1, 2002 and September 30, 2003, staff of the Disability Determination Services (DDS) unit adjudicated a total of 36,139 claims for Social Security disability benefits.

This included:

- 16,131 claims for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits;
- 13,127 claims for Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) benefits; and
- 6,881 concurrent claims for SSDI and SSI.

During this period:

- the average case processing time was 74 days; and
- the accuracy rate was 96 percent.

The SSDI and SSI programs provide cash benefits to individuals who are currently unable to engage in gainful employment.

After another year of challenges, including preparing for conversion to an entirely new computer system, increasing workloads, fiscal constraints and staff shortages, the DDS ended the year with a sense of accomplishment in having processed 102 percent of its targeted workload. This translated into timely decisions for the citizens of Connecticut who filed for Social Security disability benefits.

The Connect To Work Center

The Connect to Work Center was established in May 2001 to support the employment of persons with disabilities in the competitive labor force.

- Between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2003, the Center's benefits specialists assisted 1,790 individuals with disabilities, providing information on various benefit programs, including programs which offer employment incentives.
- Since its inception in October 2000, the Medicaid for the Employed Disabled Program enrolled 2,772 individuals. This means that 2,772 persons with disabilities in Connecticut are able to work and keep their Medicaid coverage.

Achievements during the third project year included:

- The project provides a single access point for information and assistance around benefits and services, connecting the key components of employment, health care, and benefits counseling;
- Project staff provide training, public education and outreach around benefits and services offered within the State of Connecticut, with a particular emphasis on the Medicaid for the Employed Disabled Program; and
- Project staff have continued to conduct policy review and development to enhance opportunities for individuals with disabilities to enter the labor force.

More information is available by contacting the Connect to Work Center at 800-773-4636 (voice), 860-424-4839 (TTY), or by e-mail at connecttowork.dss@po.state.ct.us.

The Employment Opportunities Program

The Employment Opportunities Program (EOP) enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by assisting those who, after completing intensive VR services, need long-term supports in order to maintain competitive employment. In 2003, the EOP served 271 individuals.

The EOP is structured so that the job supports needed by individuals with significant disabilities are customized to meet their particular employment needs. To be eligible for the program, individuals must be (1) ineligible for long-term funding supports from other public agencies, and (2) competitively employed in a job located in the community.

The key to the success of the EOP lies in the partnership it has fostered among consumers, BRS counselors, business and industry, and community-based providers of employment services.

The Connecticut Tech Act Project

The primary purpose of the Connecticut Tech Act Project, now in its eleventh year, is to make assistive technology more accessible to persons with disabilities living in Connecticut.

Major accomplishments of the past year include the following:

- The Assistive Technology Loan Program continued to grow, having provided in excess of \$2.5 million to more than 275 individuals, since its inception in 1993. This program provides low-interest loans to individuals with disabilities to purchase technology that enhances their independence of function.
- More than 85,000 people consulted the project web site during FFY 2003.
- More than 1,100 individuals attended the biannual Tech Fair, held in October 2002. This year's fair expanded in scope, offering more vendors, activities and speakers than ever before.

In anticipation of the project's sunset, the Project Director is working with other organizations to assure continuation of programs established by the project over the last 10 years. In addition, the project is working with the NEAT Marketplace to establish a toll-free telephone number for professionals and consumers to get technical assistance on currently available technology. The project's unique "entrepreneurial" model for program self-sufficiency has been presented at a variety of national and out of state conferences.

To contact the Connecticut Tech Act Project, call 1-800-537-2549 (V) or 860-424-4839 (TDD/TTY), e-mail to evelyn.knight@po.state.ct.us, or visit the project's web site at www.techactproject.com.

Independent Living Program

The Bureau's Independent Living (IL) program provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities, through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based independent living centers (ILCs).

The goal of the independent living program is to promote full integration and inclusion into the mainstream. With support from BRS, the independent living centers offer four core independent living services:

- *peer support;*
- *information and referral;*
- *individual and systems advocacy; and*
- *independent living skills training*

Working with the State Independent Living Council (SILC), the IL program:

- Provided core independent living services to more than 950 individuals.
- Transitioned 31 individuals from nursing facilities to the community.
- Provided \$10,000 to each ILC, to enable consumers to purchase services identified in their Independent Living Plans, but which are not readily available.
- Allocated \$30,000 to each ILC to supplement state and federal dollars, for the provision of core services.
- Provided \$2,000 to each ILC, to improve access to IL services for individuals who are deaf.

For a list of Connecticut's independent living centers, go to the BRS web site, at www.brs.state.ct.us, or call 800-537-2549. To contact the SILC, call 860-656-0430, or e-mail ctsilc@megahits.com.

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Patricia A. Wilson-Coker, Commissioner

Claudette J. Beaulieu, Deputy Commissioner of Programs

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